



STORIES OF FACT AND FANCY

THE
STORY OF FAIRYFOOT

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THE
STORY OF FAIRYFOOT

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N. Buchanan.

At last they reached the grove of rose-trees.

PAGE 28.

THE STORY OF FAIRYFOOT

The Story of Fairyfoot.

CHAPTER I.

FAIRYFOOT'S BIRTH.

ONCE upon a time, far away in the west country, there stood a town called Stumpingham. It contained seven windmills, a king's palace, a market-place, a prison, and everything else that befits the capital of a kingdom.

A fine city was Stumpingham; indeed, the people who lived there thought it the finest city in the world. It stood in the midst of a great plain, which, for nearly ten miles round the city walls, was covered with orchards and smiling corn-fields.

Beyond these lay a great belt of pasture land, nearly twenty miles broad, and this in its turn was

bounded by a forest so wide and thick, that no man in Stumpingham knew how wide it was. Indeed, many of the people in the city thought that it reached to the end of the world.

There were good reasons why they should think so. In the first place, it was well known that the forest had long been the home of the fairies, and therefore even the bravest of men did not care to go far into it.

In the second place, the people of Stumpingham did not care to travel; men, women, and children had feet so large and heavy that they could not walk well. Whether it was because of something in the place, I cannot tell, but great feet had been the fashion there for hundreds of years, and the nobler the family the larger the feet.

It was, therefore, the aim of all who were above the rank of shepherds and such-like people, to make their feet as large as they could. So well did they

succeed, that the slippers of some rich persons often served as sleeping-places for the cat and her kittens.

Stumpingham had a king of its own, and his name was Stiffstep. His family was very old, and very, very large-footed. His people called him 'Lord of the World,' and every year he made a grand speech to them about the mighty land over which he ruled.

His queen, Hammerheel, was looked upon as the greatest beauty in Stumpingham, for her shoe was not much less than a fishing-boat. Their first six children were every bit as handsome as their parents, but their seventh child was a great grief to them.

For a long time after its birth nobody about the palace could understand what was the matter—the ladies-in-waiting seemed so much troubled, and the king looked so angry.

At last, however, it was whispered through the city that the queen's

seventh child had been born with such small feet that the like had never been seen or heard of before. 'Only fairies have feet like those,' said the wise people who saw them.

CHAPTER II.

HOW FAIRYFOOT GOT HIS NAME.

NEVER before in the history of Stumpingham had a king's son been born with such tiny feet. The common people thought that some great trouble was going to befall the city; the learned men began to write books about it; all the friends of the king and queen came to the palace to mourn with them over the sad event.

All the lords and ladies of the court, and most of the people in the city, joined in the mourning. At the end of seven days, however, they began to think that all their tears

were of no use, and so the friends went back to their homes, and the people took to their work.

If the learned men's books were written, nobody ever read them; and to help the queen to get over her sorrow, the young prince was sent out to the pasture lands, to be brought up among the shepherds.

The chief man there was called Fleecefold, and his wife's name was Rough Ruddy. They lived in a snug cottage with their son Blackthorn and their daughter Brownberry, and were looked upon as great people, because they kept the king's sheep. Moreover, Fleecefold's family was known to be a very old one; and Rough Ruddy boasted that she had the largest feet in all the pastures.

The shepherds held them in high respect, and it grew still higher when the news spread that the king's seventh son had been sent to their cottage. People came from all quarters to see

the young prince, and great was the sorrow over his tiny feet.

The king and queen had given him no fewer than fourteen names, for such was the fashion in the king's family. But the honest country people did not know by which of the fourteen to call him, and so, as his feet were the strangest thing about him, they began to call him Fairyfoot.

At first they were afraid they might get into trouble for doing this, but when no notice was taken by the king or those at the court, the shepherds felt they were doing no harm. From that time onward, the boy was always known in all the pasture lands as Fairyfoot.

At court it was not thought polite to speak of him at all. His birthday was never kept, nor was he sent for at Christmas, for the queen and her ladies could not bear to see his feet.

Once a year the youngest pageboy was sent to see how he did, and

to take him a bundle of his brother's cast-off clothes. As the king grew old and cross, it was said that he had some thoughts of casting the boy off altogether.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE BIRD.

In course of time Fairyfoot grew to be a big boy. The country air made him fair and rosy, and all agreed that he would have been handsome but for his small feet.

Small though they were, however, he learned to walk at an early age, and in time to run and to jump. As running and jumping were quite unknown among the children of Stumphingham, many of the parents were very much shocked when they saw the king's son doing such things.

All the shepherd people knew that Fairyfoot was looked down upon at the

court, and so they looked down upon him, too. The old people thought him unlucky ; the children would not play with him. Fleecefold was ashamed to have him in his cottage, but he dared not disobey the king's orders. Besides, the clothes brought by the page-boy were useful not only to Fairyfoot, but to Blackthorn as well.

At last, however, Rough Ruddy made up her mind that the sight of such nasty running and jumping would make her children vulgar ; so, as soon as he was old enough, she sent Fairyfoot every day to watch some sickly sheep, that grazed on a wild, weedy pasture, hard by the forest.

Poor Fairyfoot was often lonely and sad. Many a time he wished his feet would grow larger, or that people would not notice them so much. All the pleasure he had was in running and jumping by himself in the wild pasture, and in thinking that none of the shepherd's children could do this,

though they were so proud of their great feet.

Tired of his play, he was lying in the shadow of a mossy rock one warm summer day, with the sheep feeding around him, when a robin, chased by a great hawk, flew into the old velvet cap which lay on the ground beside him. Fairyfoot covered it up, and the hawk, frightened by his shout, flew away.

'Now you may go in safety,' he said to the robin, opening his cap. But instead of the bird, out sprang a little man dressed in russet-brown, and looking as if he were a hundred years old. Fairyfoot was so taken aback, that for a minute he could not believe his eyes.

'Thank you for your kindness,' said the old man, 'and be sure that I will do as much for you. If you are ever in trouble, call on me ; my name is Robin Goodfellow.' So saying, he darted off, and was out of sight in an instant.

Though the boy wondered for days who the little man could be, he told no one about him, for Robin's feet were as small as his own, and it was clear he would not be liked in Stumphingham. So Fairyfoot kept the story to himself.

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG THE FAIRIES.

At last midsummer day came, and in the evening the shepherds held a feast. There were bonfires on the hills, and lots of fun in the villages. But Fairyfoot sat alone beside his sheepfold, for the children in the village where he lived would not let him sit with them about the bonfire. So he had gone to the sheepfold to mourn the size of his feet, which came between him and so many good things.

Fairyfoot had never felt so lonely in his life, when a happy thought

struck him. 'Robin Goodfellow, come here!' he cried.

'Here I am,' said a sharp little voice at his elbow; and there stood the little man himself.

'I am very lonely, and no one will play with me, because my feet are so small,' said Fairyfoot.

'Come then, and play with us,' said the little man. 'We lead the merriest lives in the world, and care for nobody's feet. But all people have their own ways, and there are two things you must take care to bear in mind while you are with us.

'In the first place, do as you see the rest doing. In the second, never speak outside of anything you may hear or see, for we and the people of this country have never been friends since large feet came into fashion.'

'I will do that, and everything else you ask,' said Fairyfoot.

Taking his hand, the little man

led the boy over the pasture into the forest, and along a mossy path, in and out among old trees covered with ivy. Fairyfoot never knew how far they went, but at last they heard the sound of sweet music, and came upon a meadow where the moon shone as bright as day.

Here many beautiful flowers, daffodils, violets, primroses, and cowslips, bloomed together in the thick grass. There was quite a crowd of little men and women, some clad in russet colour, but far more in green, dancing round a little well full of sparkling clear water.

Under great rose-trees which grew here and there in the meadow, people were sitting round low tables covered with cups of milk, dishes of honey, and carved wooden flagons filled with fairy liquid. The little man led Fairyfoot up to the nearest table, and handed him one of the flagons, saying, 'Drink to the company!'

The boy had never tasted such liquid before. Scarce had it passed his lips, when he forgot all his troubles—that Blackthorn wore the best of his clothes, that Rough Ruddy sent him to keep the sickly sheep, that the children would not play with him. In short, he forgot all about his feet, and bore in mind only that he was a king's son, and thought that all was well with him.

All the little people about the well cried, 'Welcome! welcome!' while every lady added, 'Come and dance with me!'

So Fairyfoot was as happy as a prince, and danced, and drank milk, and ate honey, till the moon was low in the sky. Then the little man took him by the hand, and never stopped by the way till he had laid the boy on his bed of straw in the corner of the cottage.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAIRY FOUNTAIN.

NEXT morning, Fairyfoot was not a bit tired, in spite of all his dancing. No one in the cottage had missed him, and he went out as usual with his few sheep. Every night all that summer, when the shepherds were safe in bed, the little man came, and took him away to dance in the forest.

He did not wish to play with the shepherds' children now, nor grieve that his father and mother took no notice of him. He sat watching his sheep, and singing to himself or plaiting rushes all day long; and when the sun went down, his heart was glad at the thought of meeting his merry friends once more.

The wonder was that he was never tired or sleepy, as people often are who dance all night; but before the summer was ended, Fairyfoot found

out the reason. One night, when the moon was full, and the last of the ripe corn was rustling in the fields, Robin Goodfellow came for him as he always did, and away they went to the flowery meadow.

The fun there was high, and Robin was in haste. So he only pointed to the carved flagon from which Fairyfoot every night drank the clear, red liquid, and did not wait to see him drink it.

'I am not thirsty, and there is no use losing time,' said the boy to himself. So saying, he joined the dance; but never in all his life had he found anything half so hard, as he now found to keep up with the company. Their feet seemed to move like lightning; the swallows did not fly so fast, nor turn so quickly.

Fairyfoot did his best, for he never gave in easily; but at length, his breath and strength being spent, he was glad to steal away, and sit down

behind a mossy oak, where his eyes closed in sleep. When he awoke, the dance was nearly over, and he heard two little ladies dressed in green talking close beside him.

'What a pretty boy!' said one of them. 'He is worthy to be a king's son. See what handsome feet he has!'

'Yes,' said the other, with a laugh that sounded spiteful; 'they are just like the feet Princess Mayblossom used to have, before she washed them in the Growing Well. Her father has sent far and wide in search of a doctor who can make them small again. But nothing in this world can do it, except the water of the Fairy Fountain, and none but we and the nightingales know where it is.'

'One would not care to let everybody know of it,' said the first little lady, 'for such great crowds of people would come, there would be no peace for miles around. But you will surely

send word to the sweet princess, who was so kind to our birds and butterflies, and who danced so much like one of ourselves?'

'Not I,' said the spiteful fairy. 'Her father cut down the very cedar that I loved best in the whole forest, and had it made into a chest in which to hold his money. Besides, I never liked the princess—every one praised her so. But come, we shall be too late for the last dance.'

CHAPTER VI.

FAIRYFOOT RUNS AWAY.

WHEN the little ladies were gone, Fairyfoot was so filled with wonder that he could sleep no more. He did not think it strange that the fairies should praise his feet, for they were much the same as their own.

But it filled him with surprise that Princess Mayblossom's father

should be vexed at her growing large. Moreover, since he found there were really other places in the world beside Stumpingham, he thought he would like to see this princess, and her country.

When Robin Goodfellow came to take him home, he dared not let the little man know that he had overheard anything. Never was the boy so unwilling to get up as on that morning, and all day he was so weary that in the afternoon he fell asleep, with his head resting on a clump of rushes.

It was not often that any one thought of looking after him and the sickly sheep; but it so chanced that toward evening the old shepherd, Fleecefold, thought he would see how things went on in the pastures.

Now, Fleecefold had a very bad temper, and no sooner did he catch sight of Fairyfoot sleeping, and the flock straying, than he began to shout

at the boy with all his might, and to shake his big stick at him. His voice was so loud that it woke Fairyfoot, who, seeing the thick stick, began to run away. On came Fleecefold as fast as his great feet would carry him; and Fairyfoot, seeing no other shelter from his anger, fled into the forest, and never stopped till he reached the banks of a swift stream. Thinking that it might lead him to the fairies' dancing-ground, he followed the stream for many an hour. It wound away into the heart of the forest, flowing through dells, falling over mossy rocks, and at last leading the boy, when he was tired, and night had fallen, to a grove of great rose-trees. Here the bright moon made it as light as day, and scores of nightingales sang in the branches. In the midst of the grove was a clear spring, bordered by banks of lilies, and Fairy-

foot sat down by it to rest himself and to listen.

The singing was so sweet that he could have listened for ever, but soon the nightingales left off their songs, and began to talk together in the silence of the night.

'What boy is that,' said one perched on a branch above his head, 'who sits so lonely by the Fairy Fountain? He has such small and handsome feet that he cannot have come from Stumpingham.'

'Oh, no,' said another; 'he must have come from the west country. I wonder how he found his way.'

'Why,' said the third nightingale, 'that is easy enough. What had he to do but to follow the ground-ivy which grows over height and hollow, bank and bush, from the lowest gate of the king's kitchen garden to the root of this rose-tree? He looks a wise boy, and I hope he will keep the secret, or we shall have all the

west country here, dabbling in our fountain, and leaving us no rest either to talk or to sing.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCESS MAYBLOSSOM.

So long as the birds kept on speaking, Fairyfoot was too much lost in wonder even to think. But, by-and-by, when they stopped talking, and began to sing, he thought that it might be as well for him to follow the ground-ivy, and in this way reach the king's palace.

'Not only,' said he, 'shall I see the Princess Mayblossom, but I shall get rid of Rough Ruddy, the sickly sheep, and the cross old shepherd.'

It was a long journey; but he went on and on, eating fruits and wild berries by day, and sleeping in the hollows of old trees by night. He never lost sight of the ground-ivy,

which led him over height and hollow, past the bush and brake, right through the forest.

On leaving the forest, he came to a noble high-road, which ran past waving fields and pretty villages. It led towards a great city, and ended at last beside a low, old-fashioned gate at the bottom of the king's kitchen garden. This gate was thought too mean for even the servants, and had not been opened for seven years.

There was no use knocking, for the gate was overgrown with moss and tall weeds; so, being a n active boy, he climbed over, and walked through the garden. He had not gone far when a white fawn came frisking by, and he heard a soft voice saying sadly, 'Come back, come back, my fawn! I cannot run and play with you now, my feet have grown so heavy.' Looking round, Fairyfoot saw the most beautiful young princess in the

world, dressed in snow-white, and wearing a wreath of roses on her golden hair. She was walking very slowly, as the great people of Stumpingham did, for her feet were as large as theirs. After her came six young ladies, also dressed in white, and walking slowly. They could not, of course, go in front of the princess, though their feet were just as small as Fairyfoot's.

The boy at once guessed that this must be the Princess Mayblossom. Making her a humble bow, he said, 'Royal Princess, I have heard how much you are troubled, because your feet have grown so large. In my country that is all the fashion. For years past, I have been wondering in vain what would make mine grow. But though I cannot help myself, I think I can help you.'

'I know of a fountain that will make your feet smaller and nearer than ever they were before. I will

show it to you, if the king, your father, will give you leave to come with me.

‘You must take with you two of your maids that are the least given to talking, and the most silent man in all the king’s household. It would very much offend the fairies and the nightingales, if we made the fountain known to everybody.’

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRINCESS AT THE FAIRY FOUNTAIN.

ON hearing such good news, the princess danced for joy, in spite of her large feet, and she and her six maids took Fairyfoot into the palace. They at once brought him before the king and queen, who were seated in a grand hall, with all the lords and ladies of the court around them.

The lords were taken by surprise to see a ragged, bare-footed boy brought in

among them, while the ladies thought that Princess Mayblossom must have gone mad. But Fairyfoot, making a humble bow, told his story to the king and queen, and wished to set out with the princess that very day.

At first the king would not believe there could be any use in this, because so many great doctors had failed to make the Princess Mayblossom’s feet any less. The lords and ladies laughed poor Fairyfoot to scorn ; the pages wanted to turn him out for a cheat ; the chief nobles said that he ought to be put to death for telling the king a falsehood.

Fairyfoot was wishing himself safe in the forest again, or even keeping the sickly sheep, when the queen began to speak. Being a wise woman, she said to her husband, ‘Do you notice what nice feet this boy has? There may be some truth in his story.

‘For the sake of our only daughter, we must let slip no chance of

helping her, I will choose the two maids who talk least, and I will send with them my steward, who is the most silent man in the house. All these shall go with the princess to take care of her, and who knows but that our sorrow may be turned into joy?

After some time the king gave his consent, though it was against the advice of all his nobles. The two maids, the silent steward, and her fawn, which would not stay behind, were sent with the Princess Mayblossom, and they all set out after dinner.

Fairyfoot had hard work keeping them along the track of the ground-ivy. The maids and the steward did not like the brambles and the rough roots of the forest; and they thought it hard to eat fruits and berries, and sleep in hollow trees. But the princess went on with a brave heart, and at last they reached the grove of rose-trees, and the spring with lilies growing round it.

First the steward washed in the spring; and though his hair had been gray, and his face full of wrinkles, the young nobles at the court envied him his beauty for years after. Then the maids washed, and from that day onward they were looked upon as the fairest ladies at the palace.

Last of all, the princess washed. It could not make her no fairer in face; but the moment her feet touched the water, they began to grow less, and when she had washed and dried them three times, they were as small and finely shaped as Fairyfoot's own.

CHAPTER IX.

A HAPPY ENDING.

THERE was great joy among them at the change in the Princess Mayblossom's feet. But Fairyfoot could not help saying in a sad voice, 'If there had only been a well that would

have made my feet large, my father and mother would not have cast me off, nor sent me to live among the shepherds.'

'Cheer up,' said the Princess Mayblossom; 'if you want to make your feet larger, there is a well in this very forest that will serve your purpose. Last summer, I came with my father and his woodmen to see a great cedar cut down, of which he meant to make a money-chest.

'While they were busy with the cedar, I saw a bramble-branch thick with berries, some black, some red, and some green. It was the longest branch that ever grew, I think, but for the sake of the berries, I went on and on. I came at last to the root, which grew hard by a muddy-looking well, with banks of dark-green moss, in the deepest part of the forest.'

'The day was warm and dry, and my feet were sore with the rough ground; so I took off my scarlet

shoes, and washed my feet in the well. But as I washed they grew larger every minute, and until to-day nothing has been able to make them less. I saw the bramble as we came along; indeed, it is not far away, and as you have shown me the Fairy Fountain, I will show you the Growing Well.'

Up rose Fairyfoot and Princess Mayblossom, and ran off in search of the bramble. After a time they came to where its root grew in the deepest dell of the forest, hard by the muddy-looking well with the banks of dark-green moss. Fairyfoot sat down to wash, but at that moment he heard a sound of music, and knew it was the fairies going to their dancing-ground.

'If my feet grow large,' said the boy to himself, 'how shall I dance with them?' Rising quickly, he took the Princess Mayblossom by the hand. The fawn followed them; the maids and the steward followed it, and

all followed the music through the forest. At last they came into the flower-decked green. Robin Goodfellow bade the company welcome for Fairyfoot's sake, and gave to everyone a drink of the fairy liquid. They danced from the rosy sunset till the gray dawn, and nobody was tired; but before the lark began to sing, Robin took them all safe home, as he used to take Fairyfoot.

There was great joy that day in the palace, because Princess Mayblossom's feet were made small again. The king gave Fairyfoot all kinds of fine clothes and rich jewels; and when they heard his strange story, both king and queen asked him to live with them as their son.

In course of time Fairyfoot and Princess Mayblossom were married, and are still as happy as the days are long. When they go to visit Stumphingham, they always wash their feet

in the Growing Well, so that the royal family may not think them a disgrace.

But when they come back, they make haste to the Fairy Fountain. The fairies and the nightingales look upon Fairyfoot and Princess Mayblossom, the maids and the steward, as their friends, because they have kept the secret to themselves, and there is still peace and quiet in the grove of rose-trees.

The Greedy Shepherd.

CHAPTER I.

CLOSE SHEARING.

ONCE upon a time there lived in the south country two brothers, who made their living by keeping sheep on a great grassy plain. On one side of the plain was a great forest; on the other, a chain of high hills.

No one lived in the plain but sheep-farmers, who dwelt in low cottages thatched with heath. They watched their sheep with so much care that no lamb was ever lost, nor had any of the farmers ever gone beyond the foot of the hills or the skirts of the forest.

There were none among them more careful than these two brothers, one of whom was called Clutch, and the other Kind. Though they were brothers, no two men could have been more unlike.

Clutch thought of nothing in this world but how to get and keep some profit for himself, while Kind would have shared his last morsel with a hungry dog.

This greedy mind made Clutch, who was the elder brother, keep all his father's sheep when the old man was dead and gone. All that he gave to Kind was a place as a servant to help him in looking after them.

Kind would not quarrel with his brother for the sake of the sheep, so he helped him to keep them, and Clutch had all his own way. This pleased him very much, and for some time the brothers lived in peace and plenty.

They dwelt in their father's cottage, which stood low and lonely beneath the shade of a great tree, and kept their flock on the grassy plain with pipe and crook. But after a time Clutch's greed brought great trouble upon them.

In the plain there was neither town, nor city, nor market-place, where people might buy and sell. The sheep-farmers cared little for trade. The wool of their flocks gave them clothes; their milk gave them butter and cheese. At feast-times every family killed a lamb or two; their fields yielded them wheat for bread.

The forest supplied them with firewood for winter; and every mid-summer, which is the sheep-shearing time, traders from a certain far-off city came to buy all the wool the farmers could spare. They took in exchange either goods or money.

One midsummer these traders praised the wool of Clutch's flock above all they found on the plain, and gave him the highest price for it. That was a very unlucky thing for the sheep, for from that time Clutch thought that he could never get enough wool off them.

At the shearing-time, nobody

clipped so close; in spite of all that Kind could do or say, he left the poor sheep as bare as if they had been shaved. As soon as the wool grew long enough to keep them warm, he was ready with the shears again—no matter how cold might be the days, or how near the winter.

Kind did not like these doings, and many a long talk they caused between him and his brother. Clutch always said that close clipping was good for the sheep, and Kind always tried to make him think he had got all the wool that could safely be cut. In this way their talk was never done.

Still Clutch sold the wool, and stored up his money, and one mid-summer after another passed. The farmers began to think him a rich man, and close clipping might have become the fashion, but for a strange thing that took place.

CHAPTER II.

STRANGE LOSSES.

THE wool had grown well that summer. Clutch had taken two crops off the sheep, and though the misty mornings of autumn had come, and the cold evenings made the shepherds put on their winter cloaks, he was thinking of a third.

But just then first the lambs, and then the ewes, began to stray away; and search as the brothers would, none of them were ever found again. Clutch blamed Kind for being careless, and watched with all his might. Kind knew it was not his fault, but he looked sharper than ever.

But still the straying went on. The flocks grew smaller every day, and all the brothers could find out was that the closest-clipped sheep were the first to go. Count the flock when

they might, some were sure to be missed at the folding.

Kind grew tired of watching, and Clutch was so vexed that he could not sleep. The other farmers, before whom he had boasted about his wool and his profits, were not sorry to see pride having a fall.

Most of them were sorry for Kind, but all agreed that the brothers had very bad luck, and kept as far away from them as they could, for fear of sharing it.

As the months wore on, the flock still melted away. Storms and cold weather never stopped the sheep from straying, and when spring came back, Clutch and Kind had nothing left but their lame old ewes, the quietest of the whole flock.

They were watching these ewes one evening in the primrose-time, when Clutch, who had never kept his eyes off them that day, said, 'Brother, there is wool to be had on the backs of those sheep.'

‘It is little enough to keep them warm,’ said Kind; ‘the east wind still blows sometimes.’ But Clutch ran off to the cottage for the bag and shears.

Kind was sorry to see his brother so greedy, and to make himself think of something else, he looked up at the great hills. It had been a comfort to him, ever since their losses began, to look at them night and morning.

Now their far-off heights were growing crimson with the setting sun, and as he looked, three creatures like sheep ran up a cleft in one of them as fast as any deer. When Kind turned, he saw his brother coming with the bag and shears, but not a single ewe was to be seen.

‘What has become of the sheep?’ asked Clutch. When Kind told him what he had seen, the elder brother scolded him with all his might for ever lifting his eyes from them.

‘Much good the hills and the sunset will do us,’ he said, ‘now that we have not a single sheep. The other farmers can only give us work at shearing-time or harvest; and, for my part, I will not stay here to be looked down upon.

‘If you like to take my advice, and come with me, we shall get work somewhere. I have heard my father say there were great sheep-farmers living beyond the hills in olden times. Let us go and see if they will take us for shepherds.’

Kind would rather have stayed and tilled his father’s wheat-field, hard by the cottage; but as his elder brother wished to go, he made up his mind to go with him. So next morning Clutch took his bag and shears, Kind took his crook and pipe, and away they went over the plain and up the hills.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HILL PASTURES.

ALL who saw them thought that they had lost their senses, for no shepherd had gone there for a hundred years. Nothing was to be seen but wide moorlands, full of rugged rocks, and sloping up, as it seemed, to the very sky.

Kind got his brother to follow the path the sheep had taken. The ground was so rough and steep, that after two hours' climbing they would gladly have turned back. But what could they do? Their sheep were gone, and the farmers would laugh at them.

By noon they came to the stony cleft, up which the three old ewes had run like deer. Both were tired, and sat down to rest. Their feet were sore, and their hearts were heavy; but as they sat, there came a sound

of music from the tops of the hills, as if a thousand shepherds were playing there.

Clutch and Kind had never heard such music before. As it poured into their ears, the soreness passed from their feet, and the sadness from their hearts.

Springing to their feet, they followed the sound up the cleft, and over a wide heath, covered with purple bloom. At sunset, they came to the hill-top, and saw a broad field, where violets grew thick among the grass. Thousands of snow-white sheep were feeding there, while in the midst of them sat an old man, playing on his pipe.

The old man wore a long coat, the colour of the holly-leaves. His hair, which hung to his waist, and his beard, which fell to his knees, were both as white as snow. He had the face of one who had led a quiet life, and had known neither cares nor losses.

'Good father,' said Kind, for the elder brother was afraid, and hung back, 'tell us what land this is, and where we can find work. My brother and I are shepherds, and can keep flocks from straying, though we have lost our own.'

'These are the hill pastures,' said the man, 'and I am the old shepherd. Though my flocks never stray, yet I have work for you. Which of you can shear the better?'

'Good father,' said Clutch, taking heart, 'I am the closest shearer in all the plain. You would not find as much wool on a sheep as would make a thread when I have done with it.'

'You are the man for me,' replied the old shepherd. 'When the moon rises, I will call the flock you have to shear. Till then sit down and rest, and take your supper out of my bag.'

Clutch and Kind gladly sat down beside him among the violets. Opening a leather bag which hung by his side, the old man gave them cakes

and cheese, and a horn cup to drink from the stream hard by.

The brothers felt fit for any work after that meal. Clutch was full of joy at the chance he had of showing his skill with the shears. 'Kind will now see how useful it is to be able to cut close,' he thought to himself.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE FLOCK.

THE two brothers sat with the old man, telling him the news of the plain, till the sun set, when all the snow-white sheep came and laid themselves down behind them.

When the moon rose, the old man took his pipe, and played a merry tune. At once there was heard a great howling, and up the hills came a troop of shaggy wolves, with hair so long that their eyes could hardly be seen.

Clutch would have fled for fear, but the wolves stopped, and the old man said to him, 'Rise and shear. This flock of mine have too much wool on them.'

Clutch had never shorn wolves before, but as he did not want to lose a good place, he went forward with a stout heart. But the first wolf showed its teeth, and all the rest raised such a howl the moment he came near them, that Clutch was glad to throw down his shears, and run behind the old man for safety.

'Good father,' cried he, 'I will shear sheep, but not wolves.'

'They must be shorn,' said the old man, 'or you must go back to the plains, and them after you. If either of you can shear them, he will get the whole flock.'

On hearing this, Clutch began to cry out about his hard fate, and to blame his brother for bringing him there to be eaten by wolves. Kind,

thinking that things could be no worse, caught up the shears his brother had thrown away in his fright, and went boldly up to the nearest wolf.

To his great surprise, the wild creature seemed to know him, and stood quietly to be shorn, while the rest came round as if waiting their turn. Kind clipped neatly, but not too close, as he had wished his brother to do with the sheep, and heaped up the hair on one side.

When he had done with one, another came forward, and Kind went on shearing by the bright moonlight till the whole flock were shorn.

'You have done well,' said the old man. 'Take the hair and the flock for your wages, and return with them to the plain. And you may take this useless brother of yours as a shepherd to keep them.'

Kind did not much like keeping wolves, but before he could answer a strange thing took place. The wolves

were changed into the very sheep which had strayed away! All, however, had grown fatter and thicker of fleece while they had been among the hills.

The hair he had cut off had become a heap of wool so fine and soft that its like had never been seen in the plain.

Clutch packed it into his empty bag, and was glad to go back to the plain with his brother. The old man sent them away with their flock at once, saying no man but himself must see the dawn of day in that field, for it was the ground of the fairies.

So Clutch and Kind went home with great joy. All the farmers came to hear their strange story, and ever after liked to keep near them, because they had such good luck. They keep the sheep till this day, but Kind alone uses the shears, while Clutch, I am glad to say, has grown less greedy.

